

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

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Text as prepared for: Indiana Section of the American Water Works Association

Date presented: February 23, 2000

Location: Adam's Mark Hotel, Indianapolis

(Text does not include verbatim comments)

Thank you for your warm welcome. It's a pleasure to join you this morning.

I understand that most, if not all, of my predecessors as commissioner of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management have spoken before the American Water Works Association. I'm glad to follow the tradition they have set. I speak to you at a unique point in time. A time not only significant because it's a new millennium but unique because of people's increasing awareness of the importance of the environment and how the quality of their lives depends upon the quality of the environment. Each of our organizations, in its own invaluable way, protects the public health and I cannot think of a more important or a more challenging job.

Water is essential for life on Earth and at least here in America, as well as for most of the developed world, we take clean, safe water for granted. Technology has a way of skewing people's view of reality. People living in developed societies expect to turn on the tap to capture a glass of water to drink . . . time after time after time. It is an expectation built over decades of reliable service and a commitment to provide safe drinking water.

I think Americans don't truly appreciate the water coming from their taps because they don't know the work that goes into providing that glass of water. From all the efforts to prevent pollution from flowing into surface waters, to pumping the water from its source and treating it, to delivering a finished product through a complex distribution network: It's an amazing process.

We only have to watch television or listen to the radio to understand how fortunate we are. TV brings us pictures of people in less developed parts of the world, who are grateful for a **single community well** from which to draw drinking water. And they gladly walk, sometimes miles, to these sources, carrying home huge urns full of their family's daily need for water. That's one extreme. Radio stories: In some countries that are more developed, people may only have access to water from their taps at particular times of the day or night. And those times generally are not very convenient.

Our challenge in America is to keep making our water supplies cleaner yet, and more risk free. I'm particularly proud of Indiana's new Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund. This fund helps assure that Hoosiers will walk just a few steps inside the comfort of their homes and lift nothing heavier than a glass to get a drink of water.

I will have more to say about the fund in a few minutes, but suffice to say at this point in my remarks that it is an extremely popular program. We have millions of dollars of loans already on the books with more than three dozen facilities knocking on the door for a loan. This fund

demonstrates that the State of Indiana understands the importance of clean, safe drinking water, and it has made money available at very low interest rates to assure that happens. It also demonstrates that the facilities that have borrowed money want to provide clean, safe drinking water to their consumers.

The United States and Indiana have some of the safest drinking water in the world. Allow me to share two statistics with you that show that we are well on our way to accomplishing the mission of providing safe drinking water to Hoosiers. In 1998, ninety-three percent of the 981 community public water systems met all drinking water health standards. This was an improvement of four percent from 1997. This measure of success can also be measured by the number of Hoosiers served by water systems with a record of significant noncompliance. In 1994, more than 450,000 people in Indiana obtained drinking water from systems in significant noncompliance. This number has dropped dramatically since then and, in 1998, less than 12,000 Hoosiers were served by systems in significant noncompliance. The ability to make these statements is a credit to the people in this room.

It's because of your hard work and dedication that Americans and Hoosiers can take safe drinking water for granted. We all have different, but important roles that we contribute to providing safe water. Water providers must maintain sound treatment works and distribution systems. Consultants provide much-needed and much-valued professional assistance to water systems. Local governments operate the water systems and on them, along with the county health departments, falls the primary burden of protecting and ensuring safe drinking water. Local governments also plan expansions to their water service areas and protect drinking water sources. At IDEM, we are involved in protecting the source of water supplies from pollution and regulating water systems, another means to ensure the public health.

The importance of providing safe drinking water was driven home recently by events on the White River, which is the source of about fifty percent of the city of Indianapolis' drinking water. A chemical release 50 miles upstream in Anderson devastated the fish population and posed a potential threat of contamination getting into the drinking water that the Indianapolis Water Company provides its customers. My agency communicated early on in this event with the Indianapolis Water Company and it acted proactively to minimize its use of water from the White River and to treat its finished product.

To the IWC, thank you for standing with IDEM during this event and your commitment to providing safe, clean drinking water!

Because of the ongoing investigation, I'm unable today to talk in much detail about the chemical release that occurred in mid-December from the Anderson Wastewater Treatment Plant. However, let me say that my staff has worked long, hard hours on many fronts to hold the responsible party or parties accountable for this event. We are making progress in our investigation, which is ongoing, and I am confident that we will identify the responsible party or parties.

However, this incident really highlighted how vulnerable our drinking water sources can be to possible contaminants and illustrates how we, as a society, need to be aware of our activities and how these activities may impact the environment and our health.

Because providing safe drinking water is so important, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management wants to cement an even stronger working relationship with AWWA and other water associations.

I know that there is already great work going on and a good working relationship; however, I believe we can all benefit from discussing among ourselves how we can collectively build upon the public's well founded confidence in our product, giving them even more assurance that the water coming from their taps is safe to drink. It's our goal at IDEM, as I'm sure it's one of AWWA's goals, to assure that every Hoosier connected to the water system never has to worry about the quality of their drinking water. To enhance consumers' trust in us, I look forward to the opportunity to meet with members of the AWWA's Water Utility Council. I would like to hear council members' thoughts and I want them to hear my thoughts about how, together, we can move into the Twenty-First Century to provide even safer, cleaner drinking water for Hoosiers. We have many issues to discuss like protecting drinking water sources, maintaining, expanding and funding distribution systems and improving methods to treat water. I know that there is much common ground for us to talk about; we just need to identify the most important objectives, prioritize these objectives and, then, accomplish them.

But as we look forward, we must always keep in mind where we've been and how much progress we've made. Last year we celebrated an anniversary. 1999 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the main federal law that deals with the quality of America's drinking water. This law also provides the guidance for Indiana's Drinking Water Program. In 1996, President Clinton signed into law amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act. These amendments emphasized sound science and risk-based standards, the public's right-to-know, small water supply system flexibility, source water assessment and protection and infrastructure assistance by creating a revolving loan program.

I would like to spend a little time talking about some of what I believe are the more important aspects that have come out of the amendments.

Consumer Confidence Reports: These reports to your customers about the quality of their drinking water are the heart of the right-to-know provisions in these amendments. These reports also give water systems a wonderful opportunity to communicate with their customers. Indiana's public water systems did a good job overall in preparing these reports and distributing them for the first time to their customers.

And while it's good for water systems to tell their customers about the quality of their drinking water, it would be even better to encourage citizens' active participation in the protection and delivery of safe water through such mechanisms as advisory groups or increased participation in already established citizens' forums. We may be the ultimate guarantors of clean, safe drinking water but enlisting the help of consumers to help protect their drinking water would be a tremendous advantage.

Capacity Development: IDEM believes that capacity development is an important new tool for addressing non-performing or under-performing systems. Capacity Development considers both new and existing water systems.

For new systems, Indiana's program requires these systems to submit a water management plan, which demonstrates that the applicant has adequate technical, managerial and financial capacity to operate a water system. That obviously is very important to the consumers of the finished product. If a water system cannot make this demonstration, it will not be allowed to come into existence.

For existing systems, Indiana is developing an approach that will evaluate existing systems to determine which ones have deficiencies in technical, managerial and financial areas.

If deficiencies are found, IDEM will work with the system to build up the capacity. To help IDEM work with systems with deficiencies, IDEM will soon finalize a contract for services with this association and the Indiana Rural Water Association. Together, we will provide training seminars, develop an operation/information manual, operate a toll-free telephone number of technical assistance, and develop a technical assistance web page on the Internet.

Working together, I believe we can help deficient systems that want and need help, prevent non-viable systems from forming, and take appropriate steps to remedy chronically under-performing systems.

Operator Certification Requirements: As many of you know, Indiana must change its operator certification requirement to include the requirements for certified operators at all community and non-transient, non-community water systems. A non-transient water system includes systems such as factories and schools. IDEM introduced legislation this year B Senate Bill 317 B to amend state law to require certified operators at these systems.

This piece of legislation made it through the Indiana Senate on a 48-0 vote back on January 20. **The bill has been passed by the House Environmental Affairs Committee and now awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives.**

IDEM is also taking the opportunity to update its operator certification rules and AWWA members have been active participants in this effort. If anyone who is not yet involved would like to be part of this effort, please sign up at the IDEM booth. Speaking of IDEM rules: importance of industry participation, early participation, encourage member participation, my commitment to reaching out to industry as early in the process as possible.

Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund: As I promised, a few more words about this wonderful program. Another key element of the 1996 amendment was the development of a Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund. Our state's water systems are faced with a significant investment to install, upgrade and replace infrastructure to continue to provide safe drinking water. Indiana's drinking water SRF program provides a source revenue to fund infrastructure improvements. Indiana's program has already loaned more than twelve million dollars to drinking water systems and more than thirty million dollars in loans are ready for closing. The

program is so popular that forty systems are currently applying for loans. We believe we have made significant progress in the SRF program to streamline the process and to get money to systems. I think the success of the program speaks for itself.

There are also a host of other new requirements that will impact drinking water systems this year or in the near future, which are outgrowths of the 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act amendments. They include the interim enhanced water treatment rules, changes in the public notice requirement and new ground water rules in regard to disinfecting requirements for ground water systems.

What I have described to you during the past few minutes illustrates how the regulatory climate is changing and the importance of working together to meet the challenges these new regulations bring with them. I hope and I know we can approach these new requirements not as a burden, but as another step forward to ensure the safety of the water we provide our citizens.

The American Water Works Association has been a leader in the development of these rules at the national level and has worked well with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to begin the transition. We at IDEM look forward to continuing this working partnership so that together, we make a smooth transition to the new rules. A transition that must be invisible to your customers but a transition that further justifies their confidence in us each and every time they turn on the tap for a glass of water. But it is also essential that we work together in this transition because of the extensive nature of the changes to the drinking water program.

This group has many important tasks before it. But as we enter the Twenty-First Century our basic mission remains constant: Providing clean, safe drinking water for consumers. Speaking for the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, we appreciate everyone's effort to accomplish this mission and, finally, let me raise a toast of clean, safe drinking water to our continued commitment to our fellow Hoosiers.